

THE PARAMOUNT

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Manga. It was a time of great emotional tension and strain, and the absurdities of the jester relieved the solemnity and formality of the visit. This jester was said by informants to be a man of the Moyo clan, who owed his position not to hereditary right but to a ready and witty tongue.

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522*The death of the Paramount*

It is in the ceremonies at the death of the Paramount that we find some major differences between the traditional practices of the northern and central Ngoni peoples, which might be attributed to the separate groups in Natal from which they came. I was living in Mkakatha village in the central kingdom at the time of the sickness and death of Bambo Manga, the most important of the royal women among the central Ngoni. The ritual ceremonies at her funeral were said to be almost identical with those at the death of the Paramount, and I was able to check details of similarity and difference with old men who remembered the death of Cikusi, the last Ngoni Paramount in the central kingdom for whom the full ritual was carried out. I was not able after that to pursue further possible parallels and differences among the northern Ngoni. My general impression from informants was that among the northern Ngoni the ritual at the death of a Paramount differed from that of any other prominent man only in certain details of the period and form of mourning. Among the central Ngoni, as Rattray said in a note on the text which will be given, 'such funerals were more of a military pageant than anything else. All outward signs of grief were rigorously excluded.' I can confirm that from my observations at the death of Bambo Manga.

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When the Paramount became ill, a diviner was called to give advice. He might advise that a sacrifice should be made to the ancestor spirits. He might suggest witchcraft as the cause of illness. He might advise calling in a man to give medicine to the Paramount. When, in spite of sacrifices and treatment, the Paramount died, the announcement was made from the edge of his village: *Isulu lidilikile*, 'the heaven has fallen down'. Messengers were sent to all the chiefs and to all the *alumuzana* and other leading men. From the edge of each central village the cry was made, and each chief and *mulumuzana* sent his messengers to make the same announcement in each of the villages under him.

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Among the northern Ngoni the actual ceremony of burial does not appear to have been very different from that of any other important man, with one exception, that the Paramount, like other ruling Jere chiefs, was buried at the edge of the cattle kraal in a circular pit of the kind used when digging clay for mudding houses, on one side of which there was a niche where the corpse was placed in a sitting position, facing south-east. This burying in a circular grave on the edge of the kraal was the procedure which I witnessed at the burial of Bambo Manga among the central Ngoni (see below p. 75).

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we dammed the stream and made a pool and a mound. And we put him on a rock, and on top of him we put cowhide shields and left them so. And we put firewood above. Then Ngwazi Ngozo took fire and lit that fire. Then *ligubo* was danced and the women were singing. They sang songs of *ligubo* and the *amadoda* danced (*amagiya*). The owner of the country did not cry, no, and the big people did not cry. Only the wives and other women cried.

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Habuya Dube added later that everyone came with one piece of wood and put it on the pyre; and that they killed a cow and took the fat and put it on the wood, and used the skin to wrap the body in.

In discussing the ceremony of cremation with informants among the central Ngoni, there was no reference to the suggestion made by Dr. Kuper, that cremating was a substitute for embalming to avoid the corruption of the body of the king. They regarded the act of burning as an essential element in the continuing strength of the royal line, since the heir stood in the smoke from the pyre, and in the continuing fertility and strength of the country, since the ashes were swept into the river. The concept was that the royal ruler had been strengthened with the *tonga* medicine, and thereafter his body and its strength was the symbol of the unity and strength and fertility of his country.

On the question of mourning or no mourning they were equally emphatic. 'Death cannot cut life' was an expression often on their lips during the funeral ceremonies of Bambo Manga, when great care was taken to carry out the traditional ritual as far as possible in every detail. They were shocked at the idea of mourning and wailing at such a time by any of the big people. The leading Ngoni women were expected to join the *ligubo* dances in the courtyard. Some old women of lower social rank in the village, together with the daughter of Bambo Manga, sat in the house with the corpse sobbing and crying '*Mayi, mayi*' and many of them became quite ill and others hysterical with prolonged sobbing. The leading Ngoni men were contemptuous of this display of grief. They admitted it was correct behaviour for her daughter because of the close kinship tie, but of the behaviour of the rest they said 'Ha, just like the Ntumba people.' The only behaviour which was considered correct was to dance in the courtyard openly before the house of Bambo Manga, or to slip off quietly home and rest before returning to take up the dance.

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The traditional ritual procedure at the death of the Paramount, with the exception of the cremation of the corpse, I saw in all its details at the death of Bambo Manga. The corpse was placed in the same position in the hut as described at Cikusi's death, and was wrapped in a sheep-skin first with a cow-skin over, the spleen, gall-bladder and fat decorating the head and neck. The dancing of *ligubo* by the men with shields and spears, and by the women, was continuous from the moment of death to the burial, and afterwards whenever fresh companies from the central

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(*ukugandisa*). The middle section, the main part of the ceremony, took place in the husband's village while the bridal party was there. In the last part the bride was left in her new home and three ceremonies marked her gradual integration into her new social group. 585

After the number of cattle had been decided upon in the final stage of the betrothal, the initiative was left to the girl's parents to announce the date of the *mtimba*. Eventually a message was sent through the *gogo* house of the girl's village to say that the bridal party would arrive on a certain day. Before the day came, the girl, now addressed as *umlobohazi* (the bride), was called to the *indlunkulu* in her village. There the leading women, her father's mothers, who had called in her father's sisters, gave her final instructions on how to behave in her new home. Ngoni women said that they were told at this time: 'Our child, we are putting you out of our family. We are handing you over to the other people. You were free and now your freedom is over for you are under other people. Where you are going you will meet with many troubles. They will say of you many things which you did not do. It is good to be patient.' During this instruction the girl cried and so did her mother. On the morning of the departure the girl was dressed in freshly prepared skins, her hair was arranged in the *isihlulu* (chignon) to which the gall bladder of a goat was pinned, and the gall bladder of a cow was tied to her elbow. Then, still sobbing and whimpering, and surrounded by her age mates and the female members of her house, she set out for her bridegroom's village, the young men of her village driving a bullock (*mcando*) as a present from the bride's parents to the mother of the bridegroom, in whose herd it was placed. [292 237] [152]

This part of the ceremony, the entry of the bride's party (*ukugandisa*), was held to be of great importance, since it was the first time the bride's family and friends as a group had met the husband's family. The bride's procession waited by the kraal gate, singing *mtimba* songs, and every now and then a woman of the bride's party, one of her father's sisters, sang the praises of the bride's clan. As the young men driving the bullock entered the kraal, the bridal party joined them and they began to dance in the kraal. 571 585

Now the first overtures were made between the bride's party and the people of the bridegroom's village. The older women of the village approached the older women of the bride's party, greeting them and exchanging, in the Ngoni phrase, 'words which were good and proud and showed the quickness of their tongues'.

After these advances, the men of the village came into the kraal or gathered by the *indlunkulu*. While the bridal party began to sing with their heads bowed, the chief woman from the *indlunkulu* of the bride's village came forward, bending low, and on her knees presented to the *induna* of the *indlunkulu* of the husband's village a basket containing snuff boxes and beads. She made a speech, in which she said, 'Here is [516 437]

571 our child who is now leaving her home. She has no father now. She is
585 leaving his care. We expect you to cherish her now as her father would.' In reply the *induna* assured them, 'Now she is here we will cherish her, but she must respect the owner of this house and be under her in all things.' Speeches about the absence of disease in either village were then made and the men took snuff. The bridal party and the villagers all remained seated and began to sing *umbedlo* songs (songs to be sung sitting).

585 At the marriage at Ezondweni, where I was present, the girls of the bridal party began to shiver as night fell, and a woman of the village brought a sleeping mat as an invitation to go into the huts. Singing as

[533] they went, the women of the bridal party were shown a place to sleep, and the bride slept among them for that night. The bride's party went off the next morning to the church at Elangeni for the church marriage

[797] service, while the bridegroom with a party from Ezondweni went by a separate route. In the days before the mission came, they used to spend the morning dancing in the kraal, while the husband's family killed a beast, or more than one, for the feast. During the day's dancing in the kraal, the leader of the village women took the husband's spear, came into the kraal with the village party and touched the bride gently on the shoulder. This was a sign that the bride was now one of the village group, and the correct response was for her party to turn their backs and weep to show their grief because she had left them.

[152] In Ezondweni, when the parties returned from church in the afternoon, a large crowd had assembled. The bridal party danced and sang in the kraal and outside the *indlunkulu* and now and then a leading woman of the bridegroom's village joined in. The bride and two supporting friends were given a mat to sit on, the husband and the *madoda* also sat down, the minister from the church prayed and they sang a hymn. Then the food, bowls of *nsima* with large pieces of meat on top, was divided. The names of the divisions of Ezondweni were called out and the leaders of the divisions of that village and of other villages came to get the portions for their people.

[533] Dancing continued after the feast until the bride's party took the bride to the husband's hut and left her there. The next morning the bridal party returned home singing. Formerly the bride came to the door of the hut where she had slept with her husband, and called out the praise-names of her father. She then sang the *ummekezo* song (song of the deflowering) and the husband stood in the doorway behind her. Then he went into the kraal and sat facing the bridal party, who were singing. When the bride came in with a gourd of water there was silence while she poured water for him to wash his hands, mouth and eyes. This was the first public act of service for the husband after the consummation of the marriage and ended the main part of the ceremony, after which the bridal party went home.

CHILDREN OF THEIR FATHERS

843 little children. They are not able to hear those things which
 593 belong to pregnancy.' The men on their part accepted the
 562 role of being ignorant of what was coming, though they were
 generally aware of it. It was an elaborate piece of role-play-
 ing, standardized by custom, emphasizing the separation of
 the men's and women's worlds in Ngoni life, and giving
 control and authority into the experienced hands of the
 senior women.

843 The Ngoni culture pattern forbade the wife to tell her
 606 mother-in-law herself about her condition. She had, as so
 572 often in the Ngoni pattern, to approach first a friend who
 was her confidante, who might be another young wife or a
 helper in the household. This friend had to tell her mother-
 in-law, the future paternal grandmother of the baby, who
 was destined to play a big part in the child's upbringing.

During the months of pregnancy a Ngoni woman carried
 on with her normal work in the household, including cooking
 for her husband. If she feared a miscarriage, and suffered
 from what was called 'a shaking inside', she stayed quietly
 in the hut, and, saying that she had a headache, asked her
 husband to call her friend. Then the friend told the mother-
 in-law who sent for a 'doctor' to bring medicines 'to make
 the inside not shake'. A young Ngoni woman did not expect
 843 to have miscarriages, and feared that her husband's relatives
 152 would blame her home for not giving her enough food be-
 fore marriage to make her strong and healthy in child-
 bearing.

The fear of invidious comparisons with her own home and
 upbringing also operated when the wife felt herself near to
 labour. She would keep on working up to the last minute,
 for if she told her friend that her time was come, and the
 friend summoned the senior women, they came to examine
 her. Should they find on examination that she was not about
 to deliver, they looked at her and said, 'What are you afraid
 of? Did you call us for fear?' The young wife was ashamed
 of being thought fearful, both for her own reputation and

'A NEW STRANGER HAS COME'

because it was implied that her family had not given her good instruction and advice before marriage. ⁸⁴³₁₅₂

The birth of the child

When the senior women were satisfied that labour was about to begin, they took charge of all the preparations. They first sent out of the hut all the things belonging to the husband, his clothes, axes, spears, shields, and all the good mats, pots and baskets. Only old mats and clothes and pots were used during labour, and the hut was henceforth unclean and forbidden to the husband and to all males. The mother-in-law directed operations, with the help of her co-wives, the wives of her husband's brothers, widowed sisters of her husband, and some of the wives of the younger generation. The women who took an active part in the actual delivery were the older ones, but several younger women came to assist, or look on, and to encourage the young wife. ⁸⁴⁴[422] [846]

She was made to sit on a mat leaning back against the knees of another woman, and the experienced 'midwives' were in front to receive the child in their hands. She was told to bear down and sometimes given a bark rope tied to the rafters to pull on. Though she might be in great pain, she was not expected to cry out or even to groan. The older women talked to her encouragingly, and wiped her face, or gave her a little water to drink. After the birth, the woman knelt forward leaning on her hands until the placenta was born. It was buried in a hole, in the floor at the back of the hut on the women's side.

The baby was washed by a senior woman and oiled with castor oil. The cord was tied with thread and the baby was given very thin gruel made of finger millet fried and ground. This was intended to act as a purgative to get rid of the mucus in the stomach. After this had been ejected, a tiny bit of the sour milk curds was put in the baby's mouth. ⁸⁵³

The mother was washed and covered with a cloth and left to rest, while the women folded up the delivery mat

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852 Children of Ngoni families, as also these others, chose their
 304 own time to have their ears pierced, though sometimes their
 father or father's sister or father's mother reminded them
 that it was about time. It was nearly always soon after the
 second teeth had come, and children who delayed having it
 done were taunted by their fellows: 'You, are you afraid,
 my age-mate? See my ears already have bone in them.' This
 [237] was a reference to the round plugs of bone inserted when the
 hole was large enough. A bit of thread was put in at first,
 then a small bit of grass, then a fine reed, and finally a bone
 plug. Ear piercing was always done in the cold weather so that
 the lobe of the ear would heal quickly. It was carried out by
 a leading woman of one of the Ngoni families, who watched
 the children to see how they took it. They knew it was a test
 of courage, and however much they were afraid it would hurt,
 ● [152] they stood like little statues during the operation, with a face
 as set and expressionless as when they were being beaten.

Accountability for individual behaviour was one aspect of
 866 the responsibility which Ngoni adults now began to demand
 868 from children. Another aspect was the performance of their
 allotted tasks. The responsibility for cattle herding was in a
 sense a corporate responsibility of all the boys whose fathers
 owned cattle. The older herd-boys had in fact to answer for
 [233] the condition of the cattle they brought back every evening
 to their owners. They passed on, however, a number of small
 duties, such as care of the calves, sheep and goats, to the
 younger boys, who in turn were held responsible by the older
 boys for performing these duties. The boys' world, centred
 in the dormitory, recognized grades of responsibility from
 which no one escaped.

Another facet of responsibility which was at a later stage
 868 remarked on often by Ngoni adults, was seen in children's
 [517] choice of leisure-time occupations, according to their indi-
 vidual manual and intellectual and artistic capacities. They
 stopped playing childish games and began instead to de-
 velope their skills in making things from local materials.

D. GORDON LANCASTER.—*Tentative Chronology of the Ngoni.*

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(8) Mguzulu Mphanza; one of the indunas of the Ziromba Regiment. Crossed over the Zambesi in 1836. No further particulars known.

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(9) Ntabeni Kumalo; half brother of Zongendaba. Father, Hlathwayo; mother, unknown; wife, Uthuvi. Regiment, Ziromba. Died and was buried in Ufipa Country in 1846.

(10) Mafu Kumalo; elder brother of Hlathwayo. Father, Mangangati. Killed in action prior to arrival at the Zambesi.

(11) Hlathwayo Kumalo, the son of Mangangati of the Kumalo clan; married Mqumache Ntina. He had three brothers, Mafu, Gumete and Mphange. He was the father of Zongendaba, Ntabeni, Somfula, Mgai and Lomapela.

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I have been unable to ascertain if he took part in the Great Migration. My information leads me to the conclusion that he was dead before Tshaka vanquished the Ama-Ndwandwe.

(12) Mtwalu Jere; born before the Crossing of the Zambesi, about 1833? Father, Zongendaba; mother, Nqutu Ntina; wife, Magodise; sons, Amon Jere, and Yohane Jere. Regiment, Manyaka Masoko. Refused the chieftainship because he stated that his father's, Chief Zongendaba's, last wishes had not been carried out. There is no truth in the statement that he was unfit to hold the chieftainship through physical defects. Died in Nyasaland (Angoni Land), 1880.

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(13) Mombera Jere (Mbelwa); born at Chulu on the way to Fipa, 1840. Mother, Ummame Ntina, a Swazi; father, Zongendaba; half-sister, Mphangela; blood sister, Lomagazi, who it is stated by some was born before the Zambesi was crossed; son, Chintunga, whose mother was cast off because of adultery. Chintunga's appointment was not recognised by his grandfather's indunas. Died in 1891, Angoni Land, Nyasaland.

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(14) Mperembe Jere. Not born north side of the Zambesi River; it is stated his mother did not cross the Zambesi in 1835.

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Mperembe went into the Avemba Country after the break up of the tribe, but appears to have crossed back outwards over the Loangwa River and joined Mombera and Mtwalu about 1868/9, after being badly beaten by the Chitimukulu.

It is known in the Mpononi country that he captured Chanda mukulu, sister of Chitimukulu, whom he brought back with him and married at Mtelela village near the Malawi River, that he had one son by her named Chinombo, and that after the Ngoni rebellion Chanda mukulu was returned to her own country; she resided on the Mochera River for some years. She had alits in her ears so large that one could put one's hand through them.

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My informant, Sayeye Phiri, who was born at Kasitu, was caught by Mombera's people at Kanyenda, Kotahota, and made a slave; she knew Mombera and Chanda mukulu well. She is well over seventy and resides in the Fort Jameson Location. Mperembe Jere appears to have been a disgruntled and bloodthirsty despot and to have had no interests other than bloodthirsty raids and the joys of his harem. He

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